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POEMS

—BY—

WILFRID EARL CHASE

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POEMS

BY

WILFRID EARL CHASE.

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BY WILFRID EARL CHASE.

FAITH

Maze of antinomies and miracles!
Bewildered, purblind we are led along
This rock-strewn, flower-decked, mystic, wondrous way.
Whence came? What are we? Whither are we led?
Wherefore journey we? Why such fickle path?
And Nature's myriad answers, voiced in the storm's
Wild tumult, fringed on the gentian's azure cup,
Or limned on human brow, we would descry,—
And some we darkly guess, and some we almost know.

Clothed now for me in clinging shadows, all;
But I, in thinning twilight, almost dread
The radiance, and know not evil sure
A lapse to utter dark. And thou, who now
With clearer vision seest, nor envy nor
Commiserate my present situation,
For, soon or late, will Knowledge in due turn,
From every eye the final veil remove,
Clear-sighted, all shall see the truth — or joy or woe.

But wrack awhirl the maelstrom, we of earth,—
But downs adrift the wildly hurtled winds.
For what this mortal term, for some so sad,
A tragic journey with the beldam Woe?
Are we the victims of a power malignant,
Who in our torture finds a fiend's delight?
Or for eternity of joy, God-fashioned?
Pessimism! Optimism! O Faith, I choose—
Sometime shall we be glad we've walked a
troubled way.

THE WORKS OF LIFE

High on the mountain top our goal is set.
And as we climb the undulating slopes,
Necessity is joined by host of needs:
To food is added raiment, tool, and scrip;
All these required, and are supplied —
By work.
By work. Then why on mossy bank should one
Man lie, the while his haggard brother plies
At double task? So, seeming, do the Fates
Oft partial deal. But closer scanned, 'tis seen
Their acts they ever mend: the idle man,
Beggar in pride and sickly weak in health,
By whips invisible is urged to use;
The overwrought, though fagged and worn, sustained,
Through brake and tangle hews to glades of light.

The youth arrived at laden manhood's age,
Perplexed, among the callings seeks a choice:
And as a bird within the spacious woods,
Scarce knows to nest in this or that fair bower;
So does a youth, unless by genius swayed,
Linger in doubt before he can decide.

No two possess one fund of health or strength,
One warmth of heart, one calibre of mind.
This man, rude plaiting straws, performs his glad
And proper function; that, true riving rocks,
Sings through the day. Their works exchanged,
then both
Men wretched and the hated tasks done ill.
A work commensurate with power is blest.

Full oft is there discrimination made;
As secular or sacred every work
Is categorized,—layman and divine:
As sacred as the pulpit is the shop.
To each who works aright a wage is due,
A wage proportional to work performed;
For in our widening life where ends are gained
By specialties, are digger, artisan,
Inventor, preacher, bard, for balanced living
Dependent each on each.

As wins the light in cloudless air, from first
Approach of morn to full meridian blaze,
And none can say this part light from this full
By any line is severed; so graduate
The various works of universal life.
And each and all, from him who humbly digs
To him who sings, take necessary part.
But each who digs a perfect ditch, must weave
A perfect web, then sing a perfect song;
For work by work we gain the happy heights.

GOOD CHEER

Our all-wise Father for the final good,
Doth build and mold and grind and hew and wreck
In wondrous ways, that to our mortal minds
Are often strange, incomprehensible.
This man is bowed with Poverty's iron yoke,
And life to him seems scarcely worth the cost.
This one, whose way seems flowery bright, conceals
A canker sorrow, making life a hell.
And this, though hopeful, coughs his life away.
While ye in mental discord bear, I grant,
The deepest woe of all; spirits too choice,
Too highly wrought to brave the wrenching whirl:
And in this curative retreat, which we
In love have builded for your present lodge,
I visit you today; and if a word
Of cheer God grants that I should speak, then I
Most happily will hold my visit good.

Thou first, who in this padded room I see,—
Grated the windows, padded are the walls.
A full score years, they say, has this place been
Thy dwelling; and still thou ravest, still thou canst
Not meet thy end. Thy vacant, roving eye
Marks not the kindly visage from the cold,
Nor recks of night or day, or foul or fair.
No friendly word of sympathy I speak,
Affects thee other than the winds that through
Thy gratings moan. I can but pass; still, know
That he who laid the malady, will cure
In his good time, will fully compensate.

Thou next,—may I address thee? Yes? Thou'rt sane
Today; thy eyes, thy face composed assure
Of this; more sane, perchance, than most of us
Who rove at will and are accounted sound.
Yes, yes, I know; thy friends have told me all;
The very things thou last would'st wish to do.
I know just how it is—only at times
Thy devil reigneth. But when he reigneth 'tis not
The hardest: no, not then, but sitting lone
And sane, as thou art now; feeling thyself—
For Love's sake don't—a burden on thy friends,
Guessing the time till chaos comes again,
And striving to be cheerful in thy woe.

What's that I hear thee say? "Do not condemn
Me utterly? God knows I cannot help
It — and — I try — ?"
Condemn thee? None dream of that but fools.
What choice of thine that thy unhappy sire,
Held fast in Habit's grip, addled his brain
With opium and gin? Or that the swing,
Hung from the old oak tree, broke, and dropped
Thee cruel on thy back? What choice of thine,
That thousand streams of circumstance combined
To make thy mind an eddy?
But I must on. Yet not before I say
How much I pity thee: before I say
How well I know that thou, though sitting here
In loneliness, dost, by thy patience brave
And by attempts sublime to gain thy health,
Preach sermons of inestimable worth;
For our afflictions, lately urgent, slink
In shame when we know thine.

And now another sister.
Thy sane day's not today, no, not today,
But weary years ago the last,—that day
Thy weeping mother brought the cruel news.
Swooning and falling, thou struckest thy poor
head
With violence, and some dull neighbors thought
'Twas that mishap that wrought the greatest
harm.
But—
Each picture fair was painted but to fade:
Each sound grew dulcet but to die away:
Each balmy zephyr quickly veered and chilled:
At last he came; thy reeling faith grew firm;
Thy hope, thy love, thy all so largely placed
In this true man, dying,—thou sank'st in ruin.

Before I go let me address you all,
I wish to make a prophecy,—I've such
Assurance of good news I can't resist:—
Of all diseases that afflict us now,
Science is on the traces;
The time comes on apace when these doors shall
wide
Be swung, to close again on woe, no more.
And if ye tarry not to see the day,
Know this:—that ye shall live again, all free
From malady; shall know eternal joys
That nothing, nothing, nothing can withhold;
Shall see God face to face; shall thank him from
Your hearts for every hideous hour spent here
In this retreat.

REVEALED

There is, in truth, no power of ill,
But all obeys Jehovah's will.
Unbroken white,— but blind are we;
He sendeth shadows,—then we see.

THE LAKE'S EDGE

The leaves of all the border trees
Are gently vibrant in the breeze;
Leaves of linden, oak, and thorn
Murmur sweetly, seeming born
All to pleasure, none to mourn:
And safe on parent twigs content abiding,—
Whisper low, soft and low,
As treasures dear to covert friends confiding.

Now Cynthia's silver scutcheon shines,
And thousand stars come twinkling—
Spica white, Denebola,
Regulus, Cor Caroli,
Vega, Altair, and the rest
To rival her display a gentle inkling.
And now from glades and leafy shades,
The merry sprites in caps and bells come tinkling.

They creep from crannies, nooks, and flowers—
Their cool retreats through sunny hours;
From rifted ledge, and riven bole,
From hollow gall, and yarup's hole,
From veiny, fragrant orchid shoon,
From yellow corymbs of puccoon,
From varied hosts of vernal flowers
That fledge the meads and fleck the bowers.

And as around far Saturn's orb
His satellites are wending;—
Tethys, Titan, and Dione,
Mimas, and Enceladus,
Rhea, and Hyperion,
With Japetus their starry lights are lending:
Around their queen, 'neath leafy green,
Attendant fays with phosphor lights are pending.

A murmurous music fills the air,
Diffusing, pulsing everywhere;
A sound of whirring elfin wings,
Of tinkling tones of cithern strings,
Of medleys at the water's brink
Whose trembling measures swell and sink,
Of myraid voices — hum and trill,—
A melody from rush to hill.

And now begins in fringèd light
The revelry and dancing;
Hairy gnomes from nether lands,
Avens fays, and iris elves,
All the region's fairy bands
In modest dance and merriment go glancing.
While everywhere the balmy air
Is charged with perfumes, more the joy enhancing.

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And Nature's tribes that roam by night
Come hastening to see the sight,
While even some that wake by day
Are roused from Slumber's gentle sway;
And all, enchanted, find a place
From which to view this whirl of grace,
And scarce forbear the joy themselves
As tinkles sweet the reel of elves.

But leaves of shrubs and vines and trees
Are sleeping in the gentle breeze;
Leaves of honeysuckle vine,
Leaves of scented eglantine,
Screening floods of lucent shine
Are fast on parent stems all safe abiding,
Dreaming on, softly on,
Their weary powers to Nature's care confiding.

THE DRAGON FLY

Thy earlier life was humbly spent
  Within the lakelet's shallow edge,
Amidst the various company
  Betwixt the rush and border sedge.

There sang the toad, in vernal joy,
  A drowsy trill of soothing pitch;
And there, with sleights of sorcery,
  Glided the water witch;

The hungry hawk came sweeping by—
  The gallinule and sora hid;
Athwart the water, craftily,
  In wavy lines, the serpent slid.

At last upon a halcyon day
  Thou creptest from thy lowly home,
In thy forbidding form and guise,
  Misshapen and unsightly gnome:

Thy resting place, a vervain stem;
Then in the warm and kindly sun
Came Nature deft, with gracious hand,
And gently rent thy mask-robe dun.

Behold what a wonder here!
Imago in one short hour;
Released from an ugly guise,
Endowed with another power.

Ataunt, in thy new array,
Thou cruisest the airy sea,
As skilled as a pilot bold,
As free as the winds are free.

A lord of the realms of light,
On delicate wings of air —
Off for the glen or meadow,
And presto! thou art there.

Now fixed for a trembling trice,
O airy and buoyant sprite;
Now darting anear and yon,
Taxing a nimble sight;

Now toward the azure heights,—
That province serene of sky,
That pure, ethereal realm,
Where loitering flecks drift by;

Now down to the lands of the lea—
The realm of the grigs and bees—
Resting on the june-grass tops,
Swayed by the summer breeze.

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